

Take Safety Precautions When Horseback Riding¹

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Accidents involving livestock and pleasure animals have resulted in the injury and death of farmers, family members, employees and guests on Michigan farms. Of the injuries and deaths reported by newspapers, individuals being gored, trampled or mauled to death by a bull or cow are the most prevalent; however, a review of the past four years of Michigan agricultural related deaths due to animals shows that one-half of the accidents involved horses.

While determining an accurate count on the number of deaths and serious injuries caused by animals is not possible due to reporting inconsistencies, work is underway to determine the injury and death rate as it relates to accidents on Michigan farms so recommendations can be made to reduce these accidents.

A recent survey of more than 400 Michigan farmers showed that of those reporting an on-farm, work-related injury in the past year, 27 percent of the injuries were attributed to animal handling. From 1988 to 1991, six deaths were reported on Michigan farms as a result of animal mishaps, three of these deaths involved horses.

Deaths reports show that the rider fell from the horse, or was dragged or stepped on by the animal. Again, an accurate frequency and severity of these accidents is unknown due to the lack of reporting of all animal related injuries. Accounts of horse rider injuries and deaths are very low as compared to other types of farm injuries.

Nationally, the Consumer Products Safety Commission, using hospital emergency room data, reported that in 1988 there were 8,000 head injuries resulting from horseback

riding activities in the USA. Of those injured, 27 percent required hospitalization.

While there are numerous variables that a rider may encounter while horse riding, a rider can reduce his or her risks by taking safety precautions. Some precautions include:

- Wear a helmet - A helmet approved for horseback riding reduces the risk of a closed-head injury if the rider falls or is thrown from a horse. Always secure the chin strap.
- Check equipment - Make sure that the saddle, bridle, and cinches are in good condition before mounting a horse. Repair or replace any worn or defective equipment.
- Approach the horse from the side - A horse has eyes located on the sides of its head, giving the animal wide-angle vision.
- Talk, don't yell to your horse - Horses will react more predictably when they are calm and feel secure. They are more sensitive than people to high frequency noises.
- Properly saddle the horse - Check that the saddle cinch is not too tight or too loose. You should be able to slip your fingers between the cinch and the horse's stomach.

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- Become friends with your horse - Take a few moments to calm the horse before mounting. Check the horse to make sure the animal is in good physical condition.
- Use caution when mounting - Never mount a horse in a low-clearance barn or stall aisle way. Lead the horse to an indoor arena or outside the barn.
- Lead the horse so the animal is on your left side - Use a long lead rope folded accordion-style in your left hand, never wrap the rope around your wrist, hand or body. Turn the horse to the right so you keep on the inside of the circle when turning.
- A properly maintained facility can greatly reduce the risk of injury to the handler and to the horse.
- Horses may be unpredictable - The stress of moving, loading or saddling a horse may upset it. Protect yourself by always leaving an escape path away from the animal.
- Keep children out - Children should never be allowed to care or feed breeding horses or horses with newborn colts. Stallions are unusually temperamental and unpredictable, particularly around mares in season. It takes years of experience to work safely around stallions. Take time to supervise children on a well-mannered, trained horse. Stress safety and good horsemanship when you feel they have reached the age where they are old enough to handle some of the chores of caring for a horse.
- Get help - Take horsemanship and riding lessons. Learn how to ride a horse safely with proper technique and equipment from an experienced instructor. Professional equestrian riding courses, stables, 4-H programs, and other organizations frequently offer

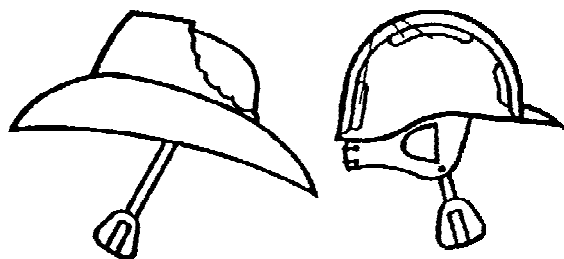
riding courses. Riding lessons from an established facility with experienced riding instructors can increase your horse riding skills and knowledge on handling and riding a horse safely. Some instructors are certified as knowledgeable concerning horses and riding techniques by horse organizations and breed associations.

- Know the riding area - Ride slowly in a new area. There may be hazards such as holes and ditches that may not be easily visible. Ride slowly until you and your horse are familiar with the terrain.

Skill and knowledge with horses is a learned experience. Obtain a supervised experience to refresh or learn basic horseback riding skills in a controlled area with an experienced instructor before you ride a horse for pleasure.

TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF AN INJURY WHEN CARING FOR LIVESTOCK:

- *Construct pens or corrals with openings to allow for an emergency exit for people working around animals.*
- *Expect any animal to be unpredictable and to do the unexpected.*
- *Avoid quick movements or approaching an animal unannounced.*
- *Keep animals where you can see all of them when herding. Avoid turning your back on any animal.*



Cut-away shows horseback riders' helmet inside western hat and padding in equestrian event style helmet.

Figure 1.